

---

# **Declaration on the Sustainable Development of International Towns and Cities**

**ITF2020**

**18 January 2020**

**Stanford University, Stanford, California USA**

## **Preamble**

In their 1987 landmark report entitled “Our Common Future”, the World Commission on Environment and Development issued a clear call to action. The Commission, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland, declared that sustainability is more than natural resource conservation and environmental protection. Sustainability promises future generations the right to a clean natural world and hope for a better future and society, while not depriving current generations of opportunity in their own lifetime. Thus, our collective future calls us to act across a broad spectrum, ranging from multi-generational global planning efforts to the daily actions and choices of every human being.

Foreshadowing one of the greatest challenges we continue to face today, “Our Common Future” profoundly stated;

“The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives. Yet each community, each country, strives for survival and prosperity with little regard for its impact on others.”<sup>i</sup>

Following in the footsteps of “Our Common Future”, we, the Stanford Center for Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness (SDGC) and the International Towns Federation (ITF), together with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives local and regional authorities, non-profit organizations, academics, and the private and public sector, in assembly on the campus of Stanford University on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, to participate the 2020 International Towns Forum (ITC2020), publish this declaration in as a global challenge and call to action. ITF2020 focused on the theme of sustainable development of towns and cities and discussed the challenges and opportunities of urbanization for further sustainable development for regions across the world.

Recognizing that every town around the globe is comprised of distinctive characteristics and cultures, a diverse and rich history, and a unique urban fabric and community, we must work collaboratively as scholars, public servants, business professionals, community organizers, and global citizens to develop effective approaches, strategies and tools that are not only able to respond to the specific challenges of each town, while also addressing global environmental, social, and economic

---

<sup>i</sup> Brundtland, G. H., Khalid, M., Agnelli, S., Al-Athel, S., & Chidzero, B. (1987). Our common future. *New York*.

---

challenges.

Affirming that the major cities and towns where we live are the driving force of our global economy and society, we believe cities are civilization's most efficient hubs of commerce, trade, and growth. Urban areas are civilization's most prolific wells of education, culture, and innovation. They are the lifeblood of our modern world, and thus must be central to any sustainable development action. In the words of Ban-Ki Moon, 8<sup>th</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations;

“Cities can be the engine of social equity and economic opportunity. They can help us reduce our carbon footprint and protect the global environment. That is why it is so important that we work together to build the capacity of mayors and all those concerned in planning and running sustainable cities.”<sup>ii</sup>

In the face of global urbanization on an unprecedented scale over the next 30 years, we also observe that urbanization over the past century has been extensive but unequal. A lack of housing and infrastructure for urban migrants, a lack of safe drinking water and sanitation for urban dwellers, and a lack of education and opportunity for children are just a few of the common challenges faced by many of our urban communities. Cities and towns have become the source of our greatest social and environmental challenges.

### **Declarations**

Based on these observations, we declare the following consensus in support of future sustainable development and urbanization of cities and towns around the world.

**(Declaration 1)** Cities and towns around the world are diverse and colorful. They are precious treasures entrusted to the present generation by our ancestors as a result of their collective vision, creativity, innovation, and hard work. We must work collaboratively to pass these treasures on to future generations, free of conditions that erode our community fabric, prevent equitable opportunity, and pollute our surroundings.

**(Declaration 2)** Cities and towns around the world vary widely. Each one is unique, with merits all its own, demonstrating the wonderful diversity of our world. Thus, we must vigorously exchange ideas across geographies and cultures, and learn one another's strength and weakness in order to develop together.

**(Declaration 3)** Cities and towns rely on rich natural resources that stretch far beyond formal municipal borders to include, for example, vast watersheds that supply clean drinking water, ocean fisheries and vast farmlands that feed rapidly growing populations, oceans that sequester urban carbon emissions, and open lands that provide space to harvest renewable solar and wind energy resources. We must take action to protect these critical life-supporting ecosystems that extend beyond urban boundaries.

**(Declaration 4)** Cities and towns around the world have long histories and splendid cultures. In many

---

<sup>ii</sup> Lewis, E. (2018). *Sustainaspeak: A Guide to Sustainable Design Terms*. Routledge.

---

regards, they serve as a spiritual center for civilization. We must collectively preserve our cultures, and their roots, as a strong foundation given to future generations.

**(Declaration 5)** Cities and towns around the world are increasingly dynamic. The population of our cities and towns is growing rapidly, and will continue to do so over the coming decades. Cities and towns have become the habitat of modern civilization. We must open communication channels, encourage deeper understanding, and strengthen cooperation and collaboration in order to promote innovation, sharing, and implementation of successful development practices and progressively improve the quality of life in cities and towns over time.

**(Declaration 6)** Cities and towns around the world vigorously compete for the benefit of their residents and the betterment of their future. We must ensure that the nature of this competition is healthy and fair by thoughtfully pursuing industries and opportunities that are best suited to each town, accurately representing both advantages and disadvantages of development, avoiding a blind faith in limitless growth, and refraining from the consolidation of resources that concentrates power and influence in a small number of urban centers.

**(Declaration 7)** Cities and towns comprise a massive global marketplace with nearly unlimited potential. Thus, cities and towns are an important center for capital investment. We must devise innovative investment and financing models and instruments that promote equitable and responsible international investment into cities and towns.

**(Declaration 8)** Cities and towns around the world are looking forward to an ever-brighter future. Viewed as a whole, our cities and towns resemble the countless glimmering stars that blanket the night sky. As beacons of light, we must responsibly deploy the best ideas of science and technology, strengthen global cooperation in the field of information technology, and share informational resources in order to collectively build cities and towns with an ever-increasing quality of life for everyone.

**(Declaration 9)** We recognize that comprehensive, long-term, and focused political commitment and leadership is needed, and should be promoted, at the global, regional, national and local levels for the achievement of sustainable development of cities and towns around the world. In this light, we are pursuing a global road map for development of cities and towns that are inclusive, healthy, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

**(Declaration 10)** We call upon all stakeholders, including international, national and local governments, research organizations, financial institutions, scholars, private industry, civil society, and all global citizens to work collaboratively with one another to foster the increasing diversity and demographic complexity of our cities and towns in order to address the social, economic and environmental challenges faced by urban dwellers.

## **Measures**

In accordance with the above consensus declarations, we agree to take the following measures in order to jointly promote sustainable development of cities and towns around the world.

---

**(Measure 1)** We agree to jointly convene the International Towns Forum annually in different location across the world in order to proactively and continuously study the problems faced by cities and towns, and to suggest and promote sustainable solutions.

**(Measure 2)** We agree to establish a global cooperation platform for cities and towns to share resources, exchange best practices, and learn the experience of one another.

**(Measure 3)** We agree to establish a database of global cities and towns in order to provide data, information, and knowledge in support of the sustainable development of global cities and towns.

**(Measure 4)** We agree to work to establish a global cities and towns “happiness index” evaluation rubric, and announce the global top 100 happiest towns annually.

**(Measure 5)** We agree to help establish sister towns for interested towns around the world in order to establish closer cooperation, information sharing, and collective learning between them.

**(Measure 6)** We agree to support the training of city and town designers, builders, and managers that understand the underlying tenets of sustainable development and will work toward the goals put forth in this declaration.

**(Measure 7)** We agree to establish a towns-focused investment fund in partnership with industry to provide financial and industrial support for the sustainable development of towns around the world.

**(Measure 8)** We agree to support and promote the open exchange and discussion of management experiences of cities towns around the world, and work to improve the quality of life and happiness index of all cities and towns.

**(Measure 9)** We agree to document the experiences, challenges, and solutions in sustainable development of cities towns around the world, and call on governments to formulate policies that are conducive to the sustainable development of cities and towns.

### **The Way Forward**

We view the inaugural International Towns Forum, convened on the campus of Stanford University on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, as the beginning of a collaborative journey by us all in pursuit of the sustainable development of cities and towns around the world and the first steps toward a better future for our increasingly urban human civilization.

18 January 2020  
Stanford, California USA